

How to write a composition

The following is a general structure to follow for many kinds of writing. Adapt it to specialized assignments as appropriate.

I. Introduction

The introduction is intended to draw the reader into the body of material to follow. It should begin with a general statement or question, sometimes called the "thesis statement" or "thesis question," followed by a quick narrowing down to the main theme to be developed in the body. Set the stage quickly, give appropriate background, then move right into a transition sentence that will set up the reader for the body.

II. Body (Argument)

The body of a written piece is where you elaborate, defend, and expand the thesis introduced in the introduction. The body should support your main contention with supporting evidence and possible objections. A good body presents both sides of a case, pro and con. As you make your case, save your best argument for last. When presenting contrary views, be sure to set forth the strongest arguments so you can avoid being charged with erecting a "straw man." The body includes three components:

Elaboration:

Spell out the details by defining, or by clarifying and adding relevant, pertinent information.

Illustration:

Paint a verbal picture that helps make or clarify your point(s). Well illustrated pieces are easier to read and follow than abstract ones.

Argumentation:

Give the reasons, justifications, and rationales for the position or view you have taken in the introduction. Draw inferences for the reader and explain the significance or assertions or claims being made.

When moving from one sub-point or argument to another, use connecting or transitional words and phrases that enable your reader to easily follow the flow of your thinking. The following is a partial list of logical connectors that you can use:

exceptions - but, alas, however, etc.

illustrations - for instance, for example, etc.

conclusions - thus, so, therefore, consequently, etc.

comparisons - similarly, by contrast, etc.

qualifications - yet, still, etc.

additions - moreover, furthermore, etc.

III. Conclusion

Make your final appeal to the reader, a finishing, all-encompassing statement that wraps up your presentation in a powerful or even dramatic fashion. Normally a single paragraph, brief and concise, will suffice. The purpose of the conclusion is to leave the reader with an idea or thought that captures the essence of the body while provoking further reflection and consideration.